

MIDDLESBROUGH COUNCIL	
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Report of:	Corporate Director of Legal and Corporate Services - Charlotte Benjamin
Relevant Executive Member:	The Mayor - Chris Cooke
Submitted to:	Executive
Date:	10 June 2026
Title:	Digital Strategy 2026–2030
Report for:	Decision
Status:	Public
Council Plan priority:	Delivering Best Value
Key decision:	Yes
Why:	Decision(s) will have a significant impact in two or more wards
Subject to call in?	Yes
Why:	Non-Urgent Report

Proposed decision(s)
<p>That Executive:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • APPROVES the adoption of the Digital Strategy 2026–2030 as the Council’s strategic framework for digital, data and technology. • DELEGATES authority to the Director responsible for ICT and Digital to make minor updates to the Digital Strategy to ensure it remains current and aligned with organisational priorities. • NOTES that delivery of the Digital Strategy will be managed through existing governance arrangements, including the Technical Design Authority (TDA), and aligned to the Medium-Term Financial Plan and corporate prioritisation processes. • NOTES that the Digital Strategy operates alongside the Council’s Artificial Intelligence (AI) Policy, which provides the governance framework for any future use of AI and emerging digital capabilities.

Executive summary

This report presents Middlesbrough Council's Digital Strategy 2026–2030, which sets out a clear and proportionate approach to maintaining secure, resilient and well-governed digital services that support effective public service delivery.

This report is presented for Executive decision as it sets out a corporate strategy for digital and technology across all Council services. The strategy establishes the Council's overall direction and governance framework. The proposed decision is a Key Decision due to its corporate impact on service delivery and customer experience across the Council.

The strategy recognises the increasing reliance on digital technology across all Council services and the need to ensure that systems, data and processes are reliable, secure and sustainable. It provides a structured framework for strengthening digital foundations, improving consistency, reducing complexity and enabling staff to work effectively and safely.

Approval of the strategy is required to establish a clear, corporate approach to digital, data and technology. Without an agreed strategy, there is a risk of continued system fragmentation, inconsistent service delivery, increased cyber and operational risk, and reduced value for money from digital investment.

The recommended approach focuses on practical, evidence-led improvement rather than large-scale transformation, prioritising stability, governance and affordability. This is considered the most appropriate option as it reflects the Council's current position, reduces risk and supports sustainable, incremental progress. An alternative option of pursuing large-scale transformation at pace has not been recommended due to the associated financial, operational and delivery risks.

The strategy aligns with national expectations for cyber security, accessibility and information governance, while supporting the ambitions of the Council Plan.

It is structured around four core themes:

- Secure & Modern Foundations
- Simpler Processes & Safe Automation
- Workforce Digital and Security Capability
- Digital Platform, Customer Experience and Inclusion

The strategy operates alongside the Council's Artificial Intelligence (AI) Policy, which provides the governance framework for any future use of emerging digital capabilities. The Digital Strategy itself does not mandate the use of AI but ensures that any future adoption is controlled, ethical and proportionately governed.

Approval of this strategy provides Members, officers, residents and partners with a clear and consistent digital direction, ensuring that digital investment is managed responsibly, securely and in line with corporate priorities.

The financial, legal, risk and equality implications of the recommended decision have been considered by the appropriate officers and are set out in the main body of this report.

1. Purpose of this report and its contribution to the achievement of the Council Plan ambitions

- 1.1 The purpose of this report is to seek approval of the Digital Strategy 2026–2030, which sets the Council’s strategic direction for digital, data and technology over the next four years.
- 1.2 The strategy provides a framework for maintaining secure, resilient and well-governed digital services, ensuring that technology supports effective service delivery, improves consistency and enables the Council to operate efficiently and sustainably.

Our ambitions	Summary of how this report will support delivery of these ambitions and the underpinning aims
A successful and ambitious town	A strong digital strategy will enable more efficient, data-informed, and connected services that drive economic growth, enhance resident experiences, and support innovation across all areas of delivery.
A healthy place	The strategy will support a healthy place by enabling accessible, preventative, and responsive services—using data, technology, and connectivity to improve wellbeing, reduce inequalities, and help residents live healthier, more independent lives.
Safe and resilient communities	This strategy enables proactive, data-led decision making, strengthening partnership working, and enhancing the council’s ability to prevent, respond to, and recover from risks and challenges.
Delivering best value	The strategy supports best value by reducing system duplication, improving governance and standardisation, and enabling more efficient ways of working. It ensures that digital investment is controlled, evidence-led and aligned to financial planning, delivering sustainable improvements in service efficiency and performance.

2. Recommendations

That Executive:

- 2.1 APPROVES the adoption of the Digital Strategy 2026–2030 as the Council’s strategic framework for digital, data and technology.
- 2.2 APPROVES that the Head of Service responsible for ICT and Digital has delegated authority to make minor updates to the Digital Strategy to ensure it remains current and aligned with organisational priorities.
- 2.3 NOTES that delivery of the Digital Strategy will be managed through existing governance arrangements, including the Technical Design Authority (TDA), and aligned to the Medium-Term Financial Plan and corporate prioritisation processes.

2.4 NOTES that the Digital Strategy operates alongside the Council's Artificial Intelligence (AI) Policy, which provides the governance framework for any future use of AI and emerging digital capabilities.

3. Rationale for the recommended decision(s)

- 3.1 The adoption of a Digital Strategy is necessary to ensure that the Council's use of digital, data and technology is secure, consistent and aligned with organisational priorities. The Council's current digital environment has developed over time and remains varied across systems, processes and data, creating duplication, inconsistency and increased operational and risk. Without a clear and agreed strategic framework, these issues are likely to impacting service delivery, governance and value for money.
- 3.2 The recommended decision is to approve the Digital Strategy 2026–2030, which provides a proportionate and controlled framework for digital improvement. The strategy focuses on strengthening core technology foundations, improving governance, and increasing standardisation across systems and processes. It enables incremental, evidence-led change and ensures that digital, data and technology are coordinated and aligned to corporate priorities.
- 3.3 A key component of the recommended approach is the use of established governance arrangements, including the Technical Design Authority (TDA). The TDA provides a formal mechanism to ensure that all digital and technology decisions are subject to appropriate scrutiny, adhere to agreed standards and architectures, and align with the strategic direction set out in the Digital Strategy. This reduces the risk of further system fragmentation, supports interoperability, and ensures that investment decisions deliver value for money and long-term sustainability. The use of the TDA also strengthens accountability, transparency and consistency in decision making across the organisation.
- 3.4 Alternative options, such as pursuing large-scale digital transformation at pace, have been considered but are not recommended due to the associated financial, operational and delivery risks. These approaches would require significant upfront investment, introduce greater complexity, and increase the risk of disruption to critical services without guaranteed outcomes.
- 3.5 The recommended approach is legally compliant and aligned with statutory requirements relating to data protection, security, accessibility and transparency. It is financially prudent, as it does not commit the Council to specific new expenditure at this stage and ensures that any future investment is subject to established governance, including TDA oversight and corporate approval processes.
- 3.6 Overall, the adoption of the Digital Strategy, supported by clear governance through the Technical Design Authority, provides a balanced and deliverable approach. It enables the Council to improve system reliability, reduce duplication, strengthen governance and deliver more consistent services, while managing risk and ensuring

that digital investment remains aligned to organisational priorities and financial sustainability.

4. Background and relevant information

- 4.1 The Digital Strategy 2026–2030 sets out the Council's approach to maintaining a secure, modern and well-governed digital environment. The decision to adopt the strategy is required to ensure that digital, data and technology are used consistently and effectively to support the delivery of the Council Plan and wider corporate priorities.
- 4.2 The recommended decision represents a new strategic framework, replacing the need for a fragmented or service-led approach to digital delivery. It establishes a single, corporate direction for how digital investment, systems and processes will be governed, prioritised and delivered across the organisation.
- 4.3 The strategy has been developed through assessment of the Council's current digital environment, including systems, processes and data, alongside engagement with the ICT and Digital Management Team and alignment with corporate governance and assurance arrangements. It reflects key drivers including:
- the need to improve digital resilience
 - reducing duplication and complexity across the technology estate
 - improving data quality and integration
 - supporting more efficient and consistent service delivery
 - alignment to national expectations for digital, accessibility and information governance
 - improving consistency in digital platforms and services to support a more joined-up resident experience across the Council
- 4.4 The strategy aligns with the Council Plan and supports delivery of wider corporate strategies, including customer experience, information governance, data management and organisational improvement. It provides a structured framework to ensure digital activity is prioritised and delivered in line with corporate priorities and the Medium-Term Financial Plan.
- 4.5 The strategy has been developed by ICT based on assessment of the Council's current digital environment and alignment with corporate governance requirements, national guidance and organisational priorities. Formal engagement with service areas will form part of the ongoing delivery and implementation of the strategy.
- 4.6 Delivery of the strategy will be managed through existing governance arrangements, ensuring that all digital decisions are evidence-led, aligned to agreed standards and subject to appropriate assurance.

5. Ward Member Engagement if relevant and appropriate

- 5.1 The Digital Strategy 2026–2030 is a corporate strategy that applies across the whole organisation and does not relate to specific wards or geographically defined services.

5.2 As such, targeted Ward Member engagement has not been undertaken. All Elected Members, including non-Executive Members, will have the opportunity to consider, question and challenge the strategy through the Council’s established governance, scrutiny and decision-making processes.

6. Other potential alternative(s) and why these have not been recommended

6.1 The primary alternative option would be to continue operating without a formal Digital Strategy, allowing digital activity and investment to be determined at a service or operational level. This approach has not been recommended as it would likely result in continued inconsistency across systems and services, increased duplication and reduced oversight of digital investment, leading to poorer value for money and increased operational and cyber risk.

6.2 A further alternative would be to pursue large-scale digital transformation at pace through significant system replacement or programme-led change. This option has also not been recommended as it would require substantial financial investment, introduce greater delivery complexity and increase the risk of disruption to critical services. It would also present challenges in aligning with current organisational capacity and priorities.

6.3 The recommended approach, set out in the Digital Strategy 2026–2030, provides a more proportionate and controlled alternative. It focuses on incremental, evidence-led improvement, strengthening governance, improving consistency in systems and processes, and delivering sustainable benefits over time while managing risk.

7. Impact(s) of the recommended decision(s)

Topic	Impact
Financial (including Social Value)	The Digital Strategy 2026–2030 does not seek any additional funding at this stage. Delivery will be managed through existing budgets and prioritisation processes. Any future investment will be subject to separate business cases and approvals. If additional funding is required in the future, a bid will be made to the Medium-Term Financial Plan. The strategy supports best value by reducing duplication, improving system efficiency and strengthening governance of digital investment, delivering longer-term financial and social value.
Procurement	The strategy will require all digital and technology procurement activity to align with corporate governance processes, including ICT oversight and the Technical Design Authority (TDA). It will strengthen procurement by promoting standardisation of systems and reducing duplication, for example through consistent platform approaches across services. All procurement activity will comply with the Council’s Contract Procedure Rules, Constitution and relevant

	procurement legislation, ensuring transparency, value for money and appropriate contract management.
Legal	The strategy supports compliance with all relevant legislation, including UK GDPR, Data Protection Act 2018, Freedom of Information Act 2000 and Equality Act 2010. It ensures that digital services are implemented lawfully, with appropriate governance, transparency and accountability.
Risk	Approval of the strategy will reduce risk by improving governance, strengthening oversight of digital systems and reducing duplication and complexity. It supports mitigation of operational and strategic risks associated with fragmented systems and inconsistent practices, contributing positively to the Council's corporate risk management arrangements.
Human Rights, Public Sector Equality Duty and Community Cohesion	An initial assessment has been undertaken and a full Equality Impact Assessment (EIA) is not required at this stage, as the Digital Strategy sets a high-level framework and does not directly introduce service changes. The strategy supports the Public Sector Equality Duty by promoting accessible, consistent and inclusive digital services. Equality considerations will be reviewed for individual initiatives delivered under the strategy, and EIAs will be completed where required.
Reducing Poverty	The strategy supports social and economic wellbeing by making it easier for residents to access and engage with Council services through more consistent, accessible and user-friendly digital routes. By reducing variation across services and creating more joined-up service journeys, residents will experience a clearer and more consistent approach when interacting with the Council, helping them access information and support more quickly and effectively.
Climate Change / Environmental	The strategy supports the Council's climate ambitions by promoting more efficient and sustainable use of digital technology, contributing to wider organisational commitments to carbon reduction and environmental sustainability.
Children and Young People Cared for by the Authority and Care Leavers	The strategy aims to improve digital services, accessibility and consistency to positively support all users.
Data Protection	The strategy involves the ongoing use and management of data through digital systems. All activity delivered under the strategy will be subject to appropriate data protection controls, including Data Protection Impact Assessments (DPIAs) where required. Advice will be sought from the Data Protection Officer to ensure compliance with legislation and to safeguard data.

Actions to be taken to implement the recommended decision(s)

Action	Responsible Officer	Deadline
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Publish the approved Digital Strategy and communicate its purpose, scope and expectations to all service areas.	Head of ICT and Digital Deputy Head of ICT and Digital ICT Management	July 2026
Implement governance oversight through the Technical Design Authority (TDA), ensuring all digital proposals are reviewed and aligned to strategy and standards.	Head of ICT and Digital ICT Management Team Leadership Management Team	June 2026
Work with services to identify and prioritise key digital improvement opportunities, focusing on consistency, standardisation and enhanced resident experience.	ICT Management Team and Service Management Teams	Ongoing June 2026
Establish a structured engagement approach with service areas, including identifying appropriate digital champions or contacts to support prioritisation, coordination and effective use of ICT and digital resources.	Head of ICT and Digital Deputy Head of ICT and Digital /	September 2026

Appendices

1	Digital Strategy 2026–2030
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Background papers

Body	Report title	Date

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